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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000427

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2019

TAGS: PGOV AF

SUBJECT: FM SPANTA-HOLBROOKE: WELCOME U.S. COMMITMENT, NEED U.S. HELP ON TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITY ISSUE.

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. FM Spanta told Ambassador Holbrooke on 2/14 that Afghanistan welcomed the United States' ongoing commitment to Afghanistan, most visibly exemplified by the proposed increase in U.S. troops. Spanta urged the United States to take an active part in seeking a solution to the transitional authority issue.

Bilateral relationship is solid

¶2. (C) Spanta opened the meeting by expressing his "hope" that President Obama would approve the proposal to increase U.S. troops in Afghanistan. He assured Holbrooke, notwithstanding western press reports, that the Afghan people want the United States here. He acknowledged the shared challenge of dealing with the civilian casualties issue. He declared that we had to reduce the casualty rate, but he was confident that would happen. He also said both sides needed to speak "quietly" on the issue.

¶3. (C) Spanta urged the United States not to lose sight of the development and governance challenges. Spanta cited one of his on-going concerns: the presence of extremist education centers in Pakistan's border sanctuaries, a magnet for many young Afghan boys. He cited the need to develop educational alternatives for boys here in Afghanistan. On governance, he ascribed great hope to this year's election, expecting Afghanistan can move towards cleaner governance and increased accountability.

Transitional authority period

¶4. (C) Spanta stated that there was no constitutional provision specifically addressing the question of authority during the May-August period. Spanta believed a political solution would be required, and encouraged the United States to take an active role with Afghans to reach a political solution. He believed a political consensus was possible, but only if it comes from pressure exerted by the United States.

¶5. (U) Ambassador Holbrooke's party cleared this message.
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